

**Public Oversight Hearing on the
Metropolitan Police Department's Proposed Plan to
Restructure the Police Service Areas (PSAs)**

**Committee on the Judiciary
The Honorable Kathy Patterson, Chair
Council of the District of Columbia**

**Testimony of
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Madame Chair, members of the Committee, staff and guests – I appreciate the opportunity to present this opening statement outlining the Metropolitan Police Department’s plans to restructure our Police Service Areas, or PSAs. And I want to thank the Committee for holding this hearing and furthering the public dialogue that the MPD has engaged in, over the last nine months, as we have developed this plan. For the benefit of the audience watching on Channel 13 and others, the text of my statement is posted on the Police Department’s website: www.mpdc.dc.gov.

As I have said throughout this process, the new PSA structure is not a “magic bullet” that, in and of itself, will address all of the public safety issues confronting our city and our Police Department. But this is a significant step forward in improving police service in our neighborhoods. I firmly believe that the new structure, as presented to the Council, will put our Department in a stronger position to fight crime and make DC neighborhoods safer. How? By helping us put police officers where they are needed most to fight crime. And by giving us the staffing flexibility to do a better job in every neighborhood of answering calls for service, targeting crime “hot spots,” and engaging the community in neighborhood partnerships and proactive problem solving. All of these are critical elements of our community policing strategy, and I believe we will be more effective in carrying out community policing in DC under the proposed restructuring of the PSAs.

The underlying PSA system is sound. It supports the type of comprehensive community policing strategy that all of us are working to achieve. But the current structure is too inflexible and not neighborhood-oriented enough for us to be as effective as we could be. The new structure goes a long way toward overcoming some of these barriers and helping us improve police services at the neighborhood level.

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For the benefit of those who may not have been closely following this process, I did want to outline briefly just how the proposed restructuring of the PSAs was developed. The plan that is before the Committee today is the result of an exhaustive process of public dialogue, public input and follow-up on the part of MPD staff. The strength of the final product reflects the input provided by residents, civic leaders, Councilmembers, other elected officials and police officers. And I want to publicly thank everyone who offered their ideas and suggestions. On the whole, their input was detailed, informative and, ultimately, very helpful to us in making a good plan even better. The depth and sincerity of residents’ comments certainly bode well for the future of community policing in our city.

The proposal was first presented to the public during the Mayor’s Crime Forum II in May 2003. Residents attending the Forum received an overview of the plan and were able to meet with their district commanders and other MPD personnel that day to learn more about the plan. Each district then hosted or participated in follow-up meetings in the community to go over the proposal in greater detail and to solicit public feedback. Preliminary maps have been posted on the MPDC

website since May, and written and telephone responses were encouraged and received. Two separate mailings, with draft maps included, were sent to our Advisory Neighborhood Commissions, to ensure that Commissioners were kept fully informed of our plans. In addition, staff and I met individually with almost every member of the DC Council to explain the plan in detail and get your critical feedback. I do want to acknowledge the staff of the MPD's Office of Organizational Development – in particular, Policy Analyst Anne Grant – for their painstaking work in soliciting and responding to public comment on the plan.

The original proposal has been modified several times to incorporate the suggestions of community members and leaders. Where reasonable suggestions have been made, we have made every effort to accommodate the wishes of the community, while still supporting the operational principles of the plan. While some will undoubtedly object to aspects of the final product, no one can argue that this proposal does not reflect extensive public input and community consensus.

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As I stated earlier, our proposal retains the underlying structure and operations of the Police Service Area concept. We are not changing our geographically based, community-oriented approach to policing. We are simply trying to make that approach more flexible and more neighborhood-oriented – and, therefore, more effective. We are trying to do what is in the best interests of our Police Department and the communities we serve.

The new system reduces the overall number of PSAs from 83 to 43. The number of police districts remains at seven, although there will be changes in district boundaries. In addition, the Third District moves from ROC-Central to ROC-North. In most cases, PSAs will get larger geographically, but there will also be more officers per PSA. As I will explain in a moment, this will give our PSA team leaders greater flexibility in how and where they deploy their officers.

We have tried hard to better align our PSAs with the natural boundaries of DC's neighborhoods. One shortcoming of the current system is that it often divides a single neighborhood into two or more PSAs. For example, under the current structure, the Trinidad community is split almost right down the middle between PSAs 507 and 508. Under the new boundaries, Trinidad will lie within the new PSA 504. Similarly, Adams Morgan is right now split among three PSAs – 301, 304 and 307. Under the new system, Adams Morgan is in the new PSA 303.

In addition, the current PSA structure tried to be a “one-size-fits-all” approach – carving out roughly “equal” PSAs, with roughly “equal” demands for police service and roughly “equal” numbers of officers. But the reality is that not all PSAs – not all neighborhoods – are the same. Different neighborhoods have different problems and different needs, and we need a structure that recognizes and responds to these differences. The new PSAs reflect the richness and diversity of individual DC

neighborhoods, and they better match police resources with the public safety needs of different neighborhoods.

I know there has been a lot of discussion over the past few months (including at today's hearing) about aligning the PSAs with the boundaries of our Advisory Neighborhood Commissions. I know that some ANCs have passed resolutions making that recommendation. I can assure the Committee that we have listened closely to the ideas and concerns of the ANCs. We have worked directly with many different Commissions and Commissioners. And we have made every effort to adjust our PSA boundaries to accommodate the ANC boundaries when those recommendations were in keeping with the overall goals of our plan. So I do believe we have worked hard to solicit, evaluate and respond to the wishes of our ANCs.

However, for operational reasons, our Department does not support the idea of having the PSA boundaries match exactly the ANC boundaries. Remember, one of our goals is to better align our PSAs with "natural" neighborhood boundaries. And while neither the ANC boundaries nor our new PSA boundaries achieve that goal completely, the feedback we have received is that the PSA boundaries come closer to that ideal. Just last week, at our regular monthly meeting, members of my Citizens Advisory Council expressed concern that many ANC boundaries are awkwardly shaped and tend to "zig-zag" around a bit. In some cases, ANCs cross physical structures or barriers – I-295 is a good example – or otherwise create areas or pockets that are not conducive to police patrols and operations.

The bottom line is that the ANC boundaries were designed and created for purposes of political representation, and our ANCs serve a vitally important role in the political process in our city. But the ANC boundaries were never designed for purposes of police operations. In trying to improve police services in DC, we need a PSA structure that supports the efficiency and effectiveness of our patrol officers. We need a structure that is designed around the needs of public safety, not the principle of political representation – as noble as that principle is. And, perhaps most importantly, we need a structure that can provide both stability and flexibility over time. Rigidly marrying the PSAs to the ANCs would make it impossible for us to change our boundaries if there were changes in crime patterns that demanded operational adjustments.

We look forward to working with our dedicated ANC Commissioners on implementing our new PSA structure and improving police services in our neighborhoods. I am confident that we can achieve those goals with two sets of boundaries – one to support police operations, and one to support the political representation of our citizens.

I mentioned staffing earlier, and I know this is an issue that the Council and the community are keenly interested in. So I want to spend some time explaining staffing plans under the new structure. Every PSA will have a minimum number of officers, generally 21 officers per PSA to cover all three shifts. There is one exception to this standard: PSA 707, which generally corresponds to Bolling Air

Force Base, will have only eight officers, as this area does not have the neighborhood policing needs of other PSAs. Our residents need to understand that 21 is the minimum number of officers. PSAs with greater demands for police service will receive more officers than the minimum – in many cases, substantially more officers than the minimum.

The methodology we used to determine the number of officers per PSA analyzes and weights different types of crimes and calls for service over the past year as a way of estimating staffing needs, both at the time of the rollout and when our strength increases to its authorized level of 3,800. Dispatched Priority One calls received the greatest weight in the formula, with extra weighting assigned to homicides and other violent crimes. Lower priority calls were factored into the equation, but were given a lower weight. Based on this weighted formula, staff calculated a percentage of work for each of the new PSAs, and then assigned officers based on those percentages – again, using 21 as a baseline minimum. PSAs with the greatest amount of work will be assigned the greatest number of officers. Those with the lowest workloads will receive the minimum of 21. And those PSAs with workloads somewhere in between will receive a commensurate number of officers. The geographic size of the PSA was less of a factor, as some of the larger PSAs in terms of geography have some of the lowest workloads.

Allow me to highlight some examples. Our analysis revealed that the new PSA 101, which covers Sursum Corda and nearby areas of Northwest and Northeast, accounted for 4.3 percent of the homicides in 2003, 6.2 percent of the other violent crimes, 6.5 percent of all property crimes, and 6.1 percent of all dispatched Priority One calls for service. These totals were at or near the top in each respective category. As a result, PSA 101 will have 95 officers at the time of rollout – and 109 officers when we are fully staffed. Similarly, PSA 306, which includes an area centered around Dupont Circle, accounted for 3.6 percent of violent crimes (excluding homicide), but 7.5 percent of property crimes and 5.7 percent of dispatched Priority One calls. It will receive 86 officers at rollout, 98 at the time of full staffing. In ROC-East, most PSAs will receive more than the minimum of 21 officers. For example, based on their workloads, the new PSA 602 in Northeast will have 75 officers at rollout; PSA 706 in Southeast will have 73. In the Second District, five of the seven new PSAs will have the minimum number of 21 officers at rollout – again, because the workload in 2D is not what it is in other parts of the city. Tables showing the specific number of officers for each PSA, and the underlying formula used to arrive at those numbers, have been posted on the MPDC website.

Under the new structure, most PSAs will continue to be led by a lieutenant and a team of sergeants. Some PSAs with larger workloads and larger numbers of officers will require additional leadership, including a captain in some cases, as well as more lieutenants and sergeants. Under the new structure, each of our captains will have functional oversight over one or more PSAs within their districts – thereby giving captains a more direct role in community policing.

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I have alluded to some of these already, but I do want to summarize some of the key benefits of the new structure.

First and foremost, commanders and PSA teams leaders will have greater flexibility in how their PSA resources are deployed. This will enable our PSAs to more effectively handle the full range of duties required under the “Policing for Prevention” strategy – answering calls for service, responding to specific crime hot spots, and engaging the community and other city services in proactive problem solving. Under the current, inflexible structure, PSAs often lack the resources on individual shifts to do much more than answer calls for service. Resources are not always available for hot spot enforcement or proactive problem solving. Under the new structure, PSAs should have the resources and the flexibility to do more – and not be forced to choose between reactive and proactive policing strategies. The result should be improved police services at the neighborhood level.

A second benefit: improved leadership on each PSA, which should translate into improved performance for the entire team. Experience shows that a key ingredient to a successful PSA is the quality of its leader and his or her responsiveness to the community. One of the main shortcomings of the current system is that, with 83 PSAs, the MPD has not been able to ensure strong, quality leadership on every PSA. PSAs with strong leaders have generally excelled, while those with weaker leaders have tended to struggle. With 43 PSAs, I am confident that the Department can provide quality leadership on every PSA.

Third, better coordination with other city services in combating public safety problems. By aligning the PSAs with neighborhoods, the PSA teams will be able to coordinate activities more closely with the Neighborhood Services “CORE Teams.” And under the leadership of City Administrator Robert Bobb, other city agencies are now giving priority to service requests that impact public safety. Greater emphasis and improved coordination on quality-of-life problems will yield public safety benefits as well.

I also believe that police-community partnerships – another key to our success – will improve under the new structure. Because the PSAs will more closely match natural neighborhoods, we anticipate that more residents will be inclined to get involved in PSA meetings, citizen patrols, problem-solving groups and other community policing activities in their neighborhoods. Under the current system, community participation has sometimes been hampered because people who consider themselves to be “neighbors” were split among two or more PSAs. With the new boundaries, PSAs will be able to coordinate more easily with existing neighborhood organizations, including ANCs, civic associations and the like. While some PSAs will have multiple neighborhoods and neighborhood organizations to work with, most neighborhood organizations should now be within a single PSA.

Finally, as you know, this restructuring comes at a time when we are taking steps to increase our sworn staffing. With the Council’s support, we have the funds this fiscal year to bring our sworn

force up to 3,800 officers, and we are committed to reaching that goal. All of these additional officers are being assigned to the PSAs, and the staffing numbers we have provided to the Committee show our projections for when we reach 3,800. We are also working – again, in partnership with this Committee and the full Council – to pass legislation that will increase the number of officers available for duty in the PSAs by reducing the number of members in non-full duty status. The disability reform provisions contained within the Omnibus Public Safety Reform Amendment Act of 2003 should be an important boost to our efforts.

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Implementing the new PSA structure is no small task for our Department. During the current 60-day Council review period, the MPD has already begun working on a number of implementation issues. These include updating our computer-aided dispatch and radio systems, as well as other critical information systems; determining staffing assignments; realigning our fleet; responding to changing space and equipment needs, and educating the community – to name a few.

There is a lot of work to be done, but we are committed to rolling out the new structure as soon as possible following the 60-day Council review period. Our current target date is May 1, 2004.

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In conclusion, I want to repeat something I said at the beginning of my testimony. The new PSA system is not a panacea to all of the issues confronting the Metropolitan Police Department. But I do believe this change will put our Department in a much stronger position to fight crime and improve the quality of policing in our neighborhoods.

I also recognize that these changes alone will not be enough to bring about the type of lasting change that all of us seek when it comes to neighborhood safety. More needs to be done on the “police side” of the community policing partnership – more officers, as we build up to 3,800 this fiscal year; more effective deployment of those officers; and continued improvements in training, equipment and other resources. More also needs to be done on the “city services side” of the partnership – greater focus on quality-of-life problems that impact public safety and greater coordination among the police, other agencies and community groups. And, more needs to be done on the “community side” of the community policing partnership – more residents attending PSA meetings; more residents joining citizen patrols and Neighborhood Watch groups; more residents actively involved in their PSAs, Citizen Advisory Councils, ANCs, neighborhood organizations and the like.

Making DC’s neighborhoods safer will take the collective effort of everyone ... residents, police officers, other city workers, elected representatives, civic leaders and everyone else working together. The new PSA structure provides a unique opportunity for all of us to re-develop and re-energize these important partnerships. Thank you very much.